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**Items for information: coordination and integration
of statistical programmes**

Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report summarizes the main conclusions of the thirteenth and fourteenth sessions of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held in New York on 23 February 2009 and in Bangkok from 9 to 11 September 2009. The modalities of data-sharing among international organizations, reviewed and approved by the Committee at its fourteenth session, are contained in the annex to the present report.

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I. Introduction

1. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities held two sessions in 2009. The thirteenth session of the Committee was held on 23 February 2009 in New York during the fortieth session of the Statistical Commission, while the fourteenth meeting of the Committee, hosted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, was held in Bangkok from 9 to 11 September 2009. Both meetings were co-chaired by the United Nations Statistics Division and Eurostat. The present report summarizes the main conclusions of the thirteenth and fourteenth sessions of the Committee. The modalities of data-sharing among international organizations, reviewed and approved by the Committee at its fourteenth session, are contained in the annex to the present report.

II. Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

A. Reporting mechanism on statistical capacity-building activities

2. At its thirteenth and fourteenth sessions, the Committee discussed the Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS), prepared by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century. The Committee expressed its support for PRESS as a useful tool for promoting effective collaboration among development partners, as it provides information and key findings on statistical areas, recipients and the amount of financial support provided for statistical development. The Committee noted that in some countries PRESS had been well received and was serving as a basis for donor dialogue. From the regional perspective, PRESS has been seen also as a good starting point for discussions on issues relating to regional coordination.

3. At its thirteenth session, however, the Committee expressed serious concerns about: (a) the low rate of response to the PRESS questionnaire and the fact that some Committee members, including a significant number of United Nations agencies, had not responded; (b) the reliability of the data, since some of the most important donors in the area of statistical capacity-building had not responded and their data could not, therefore, be included in the final results; (c) the methodology used, which could potentially lead to under- or double-counting; and (d) difficulties faced by the United Nations agencies in completing the PRESS questionnaire. The Committee stressed that some technical issues needed to be discussed further and requested the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century to present to the Committee at its next session a summary of the challenges and risks faced by PRESS, as well as a road map for the improvement of PRESS.

4. In response to that request, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century presented to the Committee at its fourteenth session a report proposing further improvements to PRESS with respect to data collection and processing and analysis of PRESS results. One of the questions raised in the subsequent discussion was how PRESS, which reports on current and future statistical activities, could be used by Committee members for planning and coordination purposes. In this context, Committee members strongly emphasized the importance of having online access to PRESS for the early identification of projects,

countries and potential financial and technical partners. The Committee suggested that, at its fifteenth session, the way in which PRESS is used be demonstrated through case studies. However, proposals for the reporting of actual disbursements in addition to commitments by development partners and for the less frequent periodicity of PRESS reports (on a biennial basis) were not supported.

5. The Committee agreed that further work would be necessary for: (a) improving response rates; (b) simplifying the PRESS questionnaire; and (c) preventing double-counting by means of the introduction of more robust methods for the identification of financing and implementation chains. The Committee urged its members, in particular the United Nations agencies, to provide a better response to the 2009 and future PRESS rounds.

B. 2010 conference on data quality for international organizations

6. At its thirteenth session, the Committee discussed the topics and format of future special events to be organized under its auspices. The success of previous events held back-to-back with the European Conferences on Quality in Official Statistics was acknowledged; however, it was also recognized that their format could be improved further. After various options for the topics of future special events were discussed, it was considered that the issue of governance of the global statistical system was of strategic importance. The Committee decided that the issue needed to be discussed as part of its regular sessions, with high-level managers in attendance. A half-day special session on the governance of the global statistical system and the role that the Committee could play was organized in conjunction with the fourteenth session of the Committee, held in September 2009 (see sect. C below).

7. At its fourteenth session, the Committee took note of the report prepared by Eurostat presenting suggestions for the organization and the agenda of the 2010 special event. After an extensive discussion about the necessity, level of participation and topic of the next special event, the Committee agreed on the following:

(a) 2010 conference on data quality for international organizations. A conference, to be held back-to-back with the 2010 European Conference on Quality in Official Statistics, will be organized in the afternoon of 6 May and on 7 May in Helsinki. The conference will be dedicated to international support for the development of national quality assurance frameworks. The target audience is the high-level management staff of international organizations, who will be joined by data management experts. An organizing committee composed of Eurostat, the United Nations Statistics Division, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the African Development Bank was formed. It was further agreed that that committee would prepare a programme proposal;

(b) Special session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. A special session on human capital will be held in conjunction with the sixteenth meeting of the Committee in September 2010. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Eurostat, the Pan American Health Organization, the World Bank and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme volunteered to be part of the team working on the special session. The

group could build on the very useful thematic proposals contained in the Eurostat report. A proposal to invite experts from the Office of Human Resources Management was noted. A brief note on the progress of the organization of the special session should be submitted to the Committee at its fifteenth session, to be held in February 2010;

(c) Network of statisticians. International statisticians constitute a distinct professional group which does not, as yet, have an established forum. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has suggested that a network of statisticians working in international organizations be established, and has taken the lead in that regard. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Bank and Eurostat have volunteered to participate in the initiative. A strategy for the establishment of the network will be prepared for discussion at the fifteenth session of the Committee, to be held in February 2010.

C. Governance of the global statistical system and the role of the Committee

8. In conjunction with its fourteenth session, the Committee held a special session on governance of the global statistical system and the role of the Committee. The purpose of the session was: (a) to increase awareness about global statistical projects and discuss what role the Committee could play in their implementation; (b) to find a better balance between formal and informal coordination mechanisms; (c) to review and better define the scope of areas of effective cooperation for the Committee, especially with respect to new statistical developments; and (d) to discuss whether a modified governance structure was necessary, in particular for the implementation of statistical standards.

9. The Committee stressed that countries and international organizations were both an integral part of the global statistical system. While the governance of the system lies primarily in the hands of countries, international organizations have an important role to play in the management of its functioning. In particular, they are instrumental in proposing new items for the agenda of the global statistical system and play a key role in supporting the implementation of global projects and standards. In this context, serious concerns were expressed that many countries, in particular countries in Africa, were lagging behind and that, in order to improve the functioning of the global statistical system, international organizations would have to make a special effort to develop statistical capacity in a sustainable manner.

10. In its subsequent discussion, the Committee focused on the particular role that it has to play within the global statistical system. In this context the Committee found it useful to distinguish between "horizontal issues", such as quality, research and development, information technology, tools for dissemination, training and so forth, which are a challenge for all Committee members, and "vertical issues". The latter are oriented towards subject matter, for instance global statistical projects, and frequently concern only a subset of Committee members. There was a broad consensus among members that it would be more beneficial for the Committee to focus primarily on horizontal issues. The Committee agreed that its role and involvement should be at three key levels: coordination, information-sharing and the management of the global statistical system. More specifically, the Committee should: (a) establish as a regular practice discussion and sharing of information on

global statistical projects; (b) provide the global statistical system with new projects and lead their implementation, while maintaining close communications with member States in the United Nations Statistical Commission; (c) coordinate work on various projects in terms of resources, timing, and periodicity and advise the United Nations Statistical Commission on them; (d) ensure the sustainability of the global statistical system through the organization of statistical capacity-building activities; and (e) be innovative, take a proactive approach and liaise with other bodies concerned.

11. The Committee discussed at some length its formal role in the global statistical system but did not come to a conclusion as to whether any specific modifications to the current governance structure were needed. In particular, the proposal to create a bureau for the Committee did not find unanimous support. It was agreed that a group of friends of the Co-Chairs would be established to prepare a road map for the future work of the Committee, which would include the development of a strategy for incorporating major projects into the Committee's work. The World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development volunteered to work with the Co-Chairs and to prepare an outline of the road map to be presented at the fifteenth session of the Committee in February 2010.

D. Modalities of data-sharing among international organizations

12. At its fourteenth session, the Committee took note of a progress report prepared by the task team on the modalities of data-sharing among international organizations, which was led by the European Central Bank. The Committee expressed appreciation for the work done by the task team, in particular in striking the right balance between avoiding the use of legal terms and highlighting the key best practices for facilitating data-sharing among international organizations. The Committee supported the suggested principle of "general non-binding best practices" for the modalities of data- and metadata-sharing and commented on its elements, identifying element (a) — "The sharing of available data and metadata among international organizations should be free of charge" — as the most important element. The best practices, as proposed in the document, were adopted, subject to some minor amendments, and are set out in the annex to the present report. The Committee agreed that no further work on that issue was required from the task team at the moment, although, it might be necessary to revisit it in the future.

E. Use of non-official data in imputations/estimations made by international organizations

13. At its fourteenth session, the Committee took note of the report prepared by the World Trade Organization on the use of non-official data in imputations/estimations made by international organizations. The Committee welcomed the report and noted that it provided many interesting ideas. However, it suggested that, while the report should be streamlined, it could benefit from being expanded through the addition of examples of good practices in the use of

non-official data. A small team of members led by the World Trade Organization will summarize the key issues and identify dimensions which are relevant and should be taken into consideration by international organizations when using non-official data in imputations/estimations. The Committee endorsed the following terms of reference for the task team's work:

(a) Identify, in a succinct manner, needs and issues related to imputations/estimations made by international organizations when compiling (i) national data (in an effort to deal with missing data or data deemed inadequate for international use) and (ii) regional and international aggregates, taking into account existing studies and references;

(b) Collect examples of good practices and selection criteria currently used by international organizations;

(c) Assess the desirability, scope, format and timing of possible reporting to the United Nations Statistical Commission.

F. Use of population estimates by international organizations

14. At its fourteenth session, the Committee considered the report of the task team on population estimates, submitted by the United Nations Population Division, and discussed the conclusions and recommendations made by the team in addressing the final objective of its work, namely, to establish internationally agreed standards for annual population statistics. The task team concluded that it was premature to attempt to establish such standards, and recommended improvements in terms of the metadata on the preparation of population estimates made by national statistical offices. The task team further proposed that a structured set of metadata for annual population estimates be systematically compiled and disseminated in international statistical publications.

15. The Committee welcomed the report and congratulated the task team for successfully meeting all of the objectives of its work. In the context of ensuring sustainability, the Committee stressed the need to raise the visibility of the task team's work, and suggested bringing the conclusions to the attention of the members of the United Nations Statistical Commission. The Committee further recommended the adoption of the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) for enhancing the scope and accessibility of metadata for population estimates.

G. Other issues

16. At its thirteenth and fourteenth sessions, the Committee took note of the oral presentations made by Eurostat on the development of a directory containing a brief description of the main statistical services of each organization member of the Committee. Committee members were requested to regularly update their details on the directory website.

17. At the fourteenth session of the Committee, Eurostat submitted a report on progress in the development of the new version of the guidelines for the implementation of the quality assurance frameworks for international and supranational organizations compiling statistics and the revised International Statistical Processes Assessment Checklist, version 2.0. The Committee was also

informed about an ongoing parallel process initiated by the Statistics Division in collaboration with Statistics Canada for the development of a quality assurance framework for national statistical systems, to be presented at the forty-first session of the Statistical Commission in February 2010. The Committee reiterated that the issue of quality management was of tremendous importance for the work of international organizations and agreed with the direction for future work outlined in the Eurostat report.

18. The United Nations Statistics Division presented to the Committee at its fourteenth session its strategy for the celebration of World Statistics Day on 20 October 2010. It planned to organize promotional activities at national, regional and international levels, including the launch of a dedicated website, the organization of a high-level ceremonial meeting and the production of a commemorative book. Committee members were encouraged to take part in the event and to support the organization of activities at the national level. They were requested to contribute publicity materials, such as posters, flyers or brochures, for the World Statistics Day website. The Statistics Division agreed to keep the Committee informed about progress with regard to the organization of the Day.

19. Eurostat updated the Committee at its fourteenth session on the progress made with regard to the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) standards and guidelines, as well as their implementation in various statistical domains, both in sponsor organizations and in other statistical agencies. The need for the organization of special courses or visits to the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange sponsors for the training of staff, as well as for support for the overall implementation of SDMX, was discussed.

20. At its fourteenth session, the Committee was informed about a Web-based inventory of global statistical standards created by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico; the Institute had recently donated the English version of the inventory to the global statistical community. A related report would be presented to the Statistical Commission at its forty-first session (see E/CN.3/2010/14). The United Nations Statistics Division intends to enrich and develop the inventory further; however, in order to keep the inventory up to date, the respective specialized international agencies, as represented in the Committee, will have to play an important role. As a first step in this direction, the Institute will give a presentation about the inventory at the fifteenth session of the Committee, in February 2010.

21. At its fourteenth session, the Committee was informed about an existing regional informal coordination mechanism within the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. During the first session of the re-established Committee on Statistics, held in February 2009, a regional version of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities had been established. It was suggested that the regional committee report to the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities on its deliberations and decisions. The Committee was of the view that this was a good initiative, which could be accommodated in the agenda of one of its forthcoming sessions.

22. The United Nations Statistics Division informed the Committee at its fourteenth session that several member States had expressed their conviction, that there was considerable scope for analytical added value by integrating geographical and statistical information. However, the process of developing global standards in

the area of geographical information was fragmented. Several regional cartographic initiatives had been organized by the Statistics Division, but a mechanism for efficient coordination and management at the global level was still lacking. The Statistical Commission will consider the issue at its forty-first session.

H. Nomination of Co-Chairs for the next biennium

23. At its fourteenth session, the Committee expressed its gratitude for the effective leadership provided by the two Co-Chairs, Mr. Paul Cheung and Mr. Pieter Everaers, and the entire teams behind them. The representative of the World Bank nominated Mr. Everaers to be re-elected as a Co-Chair for a second two-year term. The representative of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific nominated Mr. Henri Laurencin, Chief, Central Statistics and Information Retrieval Branch of the Division on Globalization and Development Strategies of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, to become the second Co-Chair of the Committee. The Committee endorsed the nominations and decided, by acclamation, to elect Mr. Everaers and Mr. Laurencin as the new Co-Chairs of the Committee for the period 2010-2011.

Annex

Modalities of data-sharing among international organizations, adopted by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities at its fourteenth session

1. The Principles Governing International Statistical Activities were adopted by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities at its sixth session in 2005. Principle 1 states: "High quality international statistics, accessible to all, are a fundamental element of global information systems." It is supported by good practices for its implementation, such as compiling and disseminating international statistics based on impartiality; providing equal access to statistics for all users; and ensuring free public accessibility of key statistics.

2. Moreover, at its ninth session, in 2007, the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities adopted the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) as the technical standard for the exchange of statistical information. This may facilitate the regular and significant exchange of data and metadata among the member organizations of the Committee.

3. Data- and metadata-sharing among international organizations is currently taking place in an environment that may be described as follows:

(a) The statistics departments of international organizations have to comply with the respective administrative rules of their organizations;

(b) Some statistics departments offer their (non-confidential) data and metadata free of charge; other statistics departments sell a significant part of their data and depend on the revenues to finance part of their budgets;

(c) The sharing of data and metadata among international organizations is very heterogeneous: there are small and large volumes, ad hoc and regular exchanges, voluntary exchanges and obligations to report, gentleman's agreements and legal contracts, etc.;

(d) A large majority of the statistics departments perceive the sharing of data and metadata among international organizations to be working relatively well.

4. Given the situation described above, the following general non-binding best practices for the modalities to share (published and non-published) data and metadata among international organizations are being established. The best practices may include the following elements:

(a) The sharing of available data and metadata among international organizations should be free of charge;

(b) The receiving organization may share data and metadata with third parties with the explicit consent of the providing organizations;

(c) The original providing organization must be acknowledged as a source when using or further disseminating data and metadata;

(d) Any transformation of data and metadata by the receiving organization (e.g., the compilation of growth rates or seasonal adjustments) must be well documented and made transparent when using or further disseminating the data and metadata;

(e) Disclaimers related to data and metadata published by the providing organization are to be repeated by the receiving organization when using or further disseminating data and metadata;

(f) The sharing of data and metadata follows the SDMX standard as adopted by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. The SDMX sponsor organizations are invited to develop within SDMX standard facilities for providing information on sources and disclaimers (see elements (c) and (e) above), e.g., as part of SDMX cross-domain concepts.